



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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MICE RELISH PINE TREES, BUT NURSERYMEN DON'T LIKE MICE

Meadow and pine mice damage thousands of dollars worth of trees in commercial nurseries each year, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported today. To prevent damage to pine, spruce, and hemlock trees that are used for construction or ornamental purposes, the Service warned nurserymen, foresters, and others interested in the business of growing conifers to inspect their plantings regularly and to take measures to prevent mice infestations.

The meadow mouse and the pine mouse are fond of the bark and roots of young conifers, according to rodent-control investigators of the Service.

In a survey conducted in Connecticut, one nursery reported that tree-girdling mice killed 7,200 Scotch pines that were 8 to 10 years old. On another nursery, tree-girdling mice destroyed 45 percent of a hemlock plantation consisting of 7,700 trees 8 to 12 feet high. A planter of red pines suffered the greatest loss reported in the survey when mice destroyed 92 percent of his 3,000 8-year-old trees.

Greatest losses apparently occur to plantings in which the trees are 1 to 10 years old.

In mixed plantings, the mice show preferences between the various kinds of trees. Where both Japanese red pines and white pines were planted, the white pines were not touched, though mice were abundant under both species. Given a

choice between Scotch pine and red pine, the rodents selected Scotch pine. Alpine fir was preferred to spruce, and in a planting of Canadian hemlock, red pine, and white pine, the mice showed a preference for the hemlock, not a red or white pine being girdled.

The damage occurs usually at the base of trees and can be distinguished from the damage caused by other rodents by the incisor teeth marks left on the trees. Trails in the grass, or under snow or underground burrows, however, are the best signs of the presence of these mice.

An expert can detect whether the offender is a pine mouse or a meadow mouse. Pine mice are mole-like in habit, and their girdling is usually done on the root of the trees. Meadow mice, however, are usually surface workers and girdle the tree from the root crown upward.

The usual method of preventing mouse damage is to clear the area at the base of the tree, creating a cleared circle of about 5 feet in diameter. Mice do not like to expose themselves to the open where their enemies may see them. This technique, however, may not always work, if nurserymen are not alert. Snow covering an exposed area serves as excellent cover, and the mice burrow under the snow to get to the tree. Constant inspection of the plantings and careful removal of cover, are necessary if losses from meadow and pine mice are to be reduced, Service officials said.

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